8:Nebesky-Wojkowitz E-5 (1950-1953) 1953 AK5 Lepcha AK5

000

New Acquisitions from Sikkim and Tibet
(Neuerwerbungen aus Sikkim und Tibet)

by René Nebesky-Wojkowitz

1953

Archiv für Völkerkunde
Volume VIII
Vienna

Translated from the German by Theodore Ziolkowski

Human Relations Area Files
1958

[Title page]

8:Nebesky-Wojkowitz--1 E-5 (1950-1953) 1953 AK5 Lepcha AK5

Archiv für Völkerkunde

Volume VIII (1953)

/269/ New Acquisitions from Sikkim and Tibet

by René Nebesky-Wojkowitz

One of the results of my three-years of ethnographic research in the Sikkim-Tibet border region, which I concluded in February, 1953, was the establishment of collections for the Ethnographic Museum /Museum für Völkerkunde/ in Vienna. The majority of the acquired objects are household implements, articles of clothing, ceremonial paraphernalia, and weapons of the Lepchas, the original inhabitants of the Himalaya kingdom of Sikkim. The Lepcha tribe, related in race and language to the Tibetans, has in the course of the last three centuries suffered a progressive narrowing of its living area as a result of the penetration of stronger neighbors. It now numbers only 30,000 members, most of whom live in Sikkim proper. A few scattered Lepcha settlements are still to be found in the vicinity of Darjeeling, Kalimpong, and the Nepalese district of Ilam, and in two valleys of Bhutan. Because of extensive adoption of the customs of Nepalese immigrants, who today form the largest population group of Sikkim, the Lepchas have sacrificed many of their native characteristics. The establishment of this first Lepcha collection therefore was very difficult, for most of the objects formerly used by the Lepchas have been replaced in more recent times by products of Nepalese, Indian, or even European origin.

The household implements included in the collection are made for the most part of bamboo; we find among them variously shaped vessels, spoons and spatulas, a churn-staff /Butterstampfer/, baskets, a grain riddle, strainers, a scale with one balance as well as wooden dishes of varying sizes, which are used for the preparation of millet beer, the alcoholic beverage preferred by the Lepchas. The tribe's art of weaving, which today is practically extinct, is demonstrated by a hand loom containing an almost completed piece of weaving; it shows—just as a second, already completed strip of weaving does

286 [386] --characteristic Lepcha patterns. The threads used for the weaving of cloth were formerly dyed with vegetable matter, of which likewise a few samples were brought along. Among the articles of clothing 291 301 there is a complete woman's costume with the pertinent ornaments: two large needles connected by a silver chain, a pair of earrings set with corals, as well as two necklaces -- one mainly of turquoise and the other consisting of corals and blue glass beads. A hat made of reed and types of nettle and a pair of men's earrings decorated with turquoises were acquired as especially characteristic articles of the garb formerly customary for Lepcha men.

534 [431] [270] As far as musical instruments are concerned, the collection comprises three flutes of varying size -- one of which is a double flute -- a jewsharp, a gong with wooden drumsticks, as well as two old war drums whose cylinders consist of copper. They were presented by bs Tan hdzin rnam rgyal, the sixth king of Sikkim (born 1769, ascended the throne in 1780, died in Lhasa in 1793) to the Lepcha chieftain of Sukmi, who bore the Tibetan title of "Dsöngpön" (r dzong dpon, "bailiff"), as an acknowledgment of faithful war servic

756 [529] A few especially valuable articles of the collection are parts of the equipment of a Mun priestess (a pouch with a carrying strap, decorated with eagles' claws, bird bills, the teeth of wild animals, and shells; plumes serving as a headdress; and parts of a rosary with a bell) which had been handed down for about three centuries in the family of a well-known Mun priestess who died a few years ago: Nork Lepchani from the village of Seket. This equipment, of which only [796] one similar specimen is known in Sikkim, was occasionally used by a Mun priestess in the king's palace at Gangtok during the ceremonies that take place annually in the night before the ceremony of the Lama dance in honor of the mountain god Gangs chhen mdzod lnga. In re- 756 771 gard to other objects used in the original pre-Buddhist religion of the Lepchas, which were likewise acquired, the following should be name amulets, magic wands, little baskets for keeping substances for magic healing, a little scaling ladder [Steigbaum] used at the burial of the [766] Lepcha priests known as Bong thing, which was supposed to aid the soul of the Bong thing in its ascent to heaven -- one of the many evidences of the shaman ideas that are deeply rooted in the Lepcha religion --, a gong used by the Yaba priests, and paraphernalia for performing cere monies in honor of the ancestral spirits, local divinities, and for the appeasement of the demons that were unleashed during the wars of the priests during which they used magic.

magic. Also included in the collection were a few urn fragments discovered after superficial excavations on the plateau of Daramdin in West Sikkim during the investigation of one version of the Lepcha legend of the building of a tower; the findings, a few of which reveal band and serrated /Wolfszahnmuster/ patterns, possibly stem from the time of the Great Tibetan Kingdom (9th century A.D.).

As for hunting and war weapons, the collection has several bows of varying size and type—among them a bow-sling used for hunting birds—, arrows, hunting poisons, bushknives, an old sword, and a round war shield of cane. Among the various fishing implements, a large casting net made of nettles deserves special mention.

It was also possible to acquire three of the rare old manuscripts written in the Lepcha script that is derived from the Tibetan alphabet; also copies of a few Lepcha books and of several wedding songs were made.

/271/ The Lepcha collection comprising 93 different objects is supplemented by a few objects of Bhutanese origin that are likewise used by the Lepchas (strips of weaving, a war shield of rhinoceros skin, small rice baskets with characteristic bright-colored patterns). The collection is further supplemented by about 300 color and black and white photographs as well as tape recordings of songs of the Lepchas and two of their neighbors, the Gurkhas and Tamang. Thanks to the friendly helpfulness of the leader of the third Danish Central Asia Expedition, His Royal Highness Prince Peter of Greece and Denmark—who is likewise to be thanked for making it possible to ship the collections to Europe in an especially favorable way—the accessible ethnographic material concerning the Lepchas was also enriched by color photographs of the costumes and dances of this tribe.

Concerning the objects stemming from the Tibetan area, we are dealing above all with ceremonial objects, which serve to supplement the Tibetan Collection already present in the museum: an almost three meter high "thread cross of the Ma mo demonesses" (Ma moi mdos), which is used as a demon trap in weather conjuring, thread amulets, paraphernalia for performing various ceremonies of the Lamas, a valuable old scroll painting (thang ka) depicting the mountain divinity g Nyan chhen thang lha, a scroll painting with pictures of the founder of the Karmapa sect—Dus gsum mkhyen po and his disciples; further, three thang ka with depictions of the oracle divinities that are relatively rarely portrayed on Tibetan scroll

000 paintings: Tshangs pa dkar po, r Do rje grags ldan, Tsi ma ra, bSei khrab chan, rDo rje shugs ldan, Kha chhe dmar po and Nam mkha' hbar hdzin. The latter three pictures are works of Lha bris pa dBu chhen mo, the court painter of the next to the last Panchen Lama.

The new acquisitions of the Tibetan collection also contain twenty different Tibetan books and manuscripts, the majority of which are rare works. Among these, the following deserve special mention: an excellently printed ritual book (from the library of the monastery of Tengyeling in Lhasa, which was destroyed in 1912) of the Kun tu bzang po religious dance; further, six different medical works—among these the compendium of Tibetan medicine known as brGyud bzhi, with two rare commentaries for the printing of which a special permit from the Tibetan government must be obtained in each case—various historical and ritual works of the rNying ma pa sect, texts used in the cult of certain oracle divinities and a book that contains directions for performing soothsaying rites.

The spread of instruction in the Tibetan language will be fostered by a series of records spoken in the Lhasa dialect, as well as by tape recordings and records of Lama songs and Tibetan folk songs, dance songs, and wedding songs. A further supplement of the Tibetan collection comprises photographs of Tibetan ethnic types, pictures of the religion dances and rites of the Lamas, and especially a /272/ series of photographs showing all the phases of a soothsaying ceremony performed by a Tibetan oracle priest while in a trance.

Bibliographical Notes

113 1. Concerning the Lepchas see the following publications:

De Beauvoir-Stocks, C., "Folklore and Customs of the Lap-chas of Sikkim." Journal and Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal (New Series), Vol. XXI, Calcutta, 1925, No. 4.

Gorer, G., Himalayan Village. London, 1938.

Morris, J., Living with Lepchas. London, 1938.

De Nebesky-Wojkowitz, R. —Gorer, G., "The use of thread-crosses in Lepcha Lamaist ceremonies." The Eastern Anthropologist, Vol. IV, No. 2, Lucknow, 1951.

De Nebesky-Wojkowitz, R., Ancient funeral ceremonies of the Lepchas. The Eastern Anthropologist, Vol. V, No. 1, Lucknow, 1952.

8:Nebesky-Wojkowitz--5 E-5 (1950-1953) 1953 AK5 Lepcha AK5

113 De Nebesky-Wojkowitz, R., "Wedding songs of the Lepchas." Asiatische Studien, Vol. VI, 1-4, Zürich, 1952.

2. For a description of the various groups of Lepcha priests, see note 12 of my publication "Ancient funeral ceremonies, etc."